THE Bishop of *ELY's* LETTER TO HIS CLERGY.

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Not in Lucy

Dear Brethren,

I Am so fully convinced, by long experience, how powerfull a *frequent Reflection upon the Vows you made at your Ordination*, would be, to awaken and excite you to a diligent and zealous performance of every part of your Ministerial duty; that as I made it my earnest Request to you at my Visitation, so now I renew it, and again beseech you, as you love your own Souls, and the Souls of those committed unto your care, to read over and weigh seriously, every *Lords day* at least, the *Solemn Questions* to which the Bishop, in the Name of God and of his Church, demanded your *Answers*, before he laid his Hands on you. And if you would likewise ponder, that most *weighty Exhortation*, wherewith the Bishop prepared you to attend unto those *Demands*, when you were made *Priests*, it would make the consideration of them, more effectuall.

Now because I fear they may not be distinctly remembred, and every One of you may not be well able to purchase one of those *Common Prayer Books*, wherein they are Printed (which commonly are only those of the Largest Volumes) I have Transcribed them, and herein sent them to you: that you may have them continually before your Eyes.

And first I will lay before you, what you promised when you were admitted *Deacons*.

Then the Bishop is required *to examine every One of them that are to be Ordered, in the presence of the People, after this manner following.*

Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the holy Ghost, to take upon you this Office and Ministration, to serve God for the promoting of his Glory, and the edifying of his People?

Answer.

I trust so.

The Bishop.

Do you think that you are truly called according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the due Order

Order of this Realm, to the Miniſtry of the Church?

You Anſwer

I think ſo.

The Biſhop proceeds,

Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament?

You Anſwer

I do believe them.

The Biſhop ſaith unto him

Will you diligently Read the ſame unto the People aſſembled in the Church, where you ſhall be appointed to ſerve?

You Anſwer

I will.

The Biſhop proceeds thus.

It appertaineth to the Office of a Deacon in the Church where he ſhall be appointed to ſerve, to aſſiſt the Prieſt in Divine Service, and ſpecially when he miniſtreth the Holy Communion, and to help him in the diſtribution thereof, and to Read Holy Scriptures and Homilies in the Church, and to inſtruct the Youth in the Catechiſm; in the abſence of the Prieſt to Baptize Infants, and to Preach, if he be admitted thereto by the Biſhop. And furthermore, it is his Office, where proviſion is ſo made, to ſearch for the Sick, Poor and Impotent People of the Pariſh, to intimate their Eſtates, Names and Places where they dwell, unto the Cu-

 rate;

rate, that by his exhortation, they may be relieved with the Alms of the Parishioners or others. Will you do this gladly and willingly?

You Answer.

I will so do by the help of God.

Again The Bishop,

Will you apply all your Diligence to frame and fashion your own Lives, and the Lives of your Families, according to the Doctrine of Christ; and to make both your selves and them, as much as in you lyeth, wholsom examples of the Flock of Christ?

You Answer

I will so do, the Lord being my helper.

The Bishop.

Will you Reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief Ministers of the Church, and them to whom the Charge and Government over you is committed, following with a glad mind and will their Godly admonitions?

You Answer.

I will endeavour my self, the Lord being my helper.

Nothing can be more solemn than this *Examination*, and the Engagements into which you entred, by the Answers you publickly made to these Questions: unless

unleſs it be the obligations you further took upon you, when you were admitted to the Order of *Prieſthood*.

At which time the Biſhop ſpake to you, as here followeth: which cannot be read too often over.

The Ordering of Prieſts.

YOU have heard, Brethren, as well in your private examination, as in the exhortation which was now made to you (in the Sermon preceding) and in the Holy Leſſons taken out of the Goſpell and the writings of the Apoſtles, of what dignity, and of how great importance this Office is, whereunto you are called. And now again we exhort you in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that you have in remembrance into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an Office and Charge ye are called: That is to ſay, to be Meſſengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premoniſh, to feed and provide for the Lords Family; to ſeek for Chriſts Sheep that are diſperſed abroad, and for his Children who are in the midſt of this naughty World, that they may be ſaved through Chriſt for ever.

Have alwayes therefore printed in your remembrance how great a Treaſure is committed to your charge. For they are the Sheep of Chriſt which he bought with his Death, and for whom he ſhed his Blood. The Church and Congregation whom you muſt ſerve, is his Spouſe, and his Body.

And if it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore consider with your selves the end of your Ministration towards the Children of God, towards the Spouse and Body of Christ; and see that you never cease your Labour and Diligence, untill you have done all that lyeth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your Charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in Religion, or for viciousness in Life.

Forasmuch then as your Office is both of so great excellency, and of so great difficulty, ye see with how great care and study ye ought to apply your selves, as well that you may shew your selves dutifull and thankfull unto that Lord who hath placed you in so high a dignity; and also to beware that neither you your selves offend, nor be occasion that others offend.

Howbeit, ye cannot have a mind and will thereto of your selves; for that will and ability is given of God alone; therefore ye ought, and have need to pray earnestly for his holy Spirit. And seeing that you cannot by any other means compass the doing of so Weighty a work, pertaining to the salvation of Man, but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same; consider how studious you ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures, and in framing the manners both of your selves, and of them that specially pertain unto you, according to the rule of the same Scriptures: And for this self same cause, how you ought

to

to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies.

We have good hope that you have well weighed and pondered these things with your selves long before this time, and that you have clearly determined, by Gods grace, to give your selves wholly to this Office, whereunto it hath pleased God to call you: So that, as much as lieth in you, you will apply your selves wholly to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way; and that you will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, for the Heavenly assistance of the holy Ghost; that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, ye may wax riper and stronger in your Ministry, and that ye may so endeavour your selves from time to time, to sanctify the Lives of you and yours, and to fashion them after the Rule and Doctrine of Christ, that ye may be wholsom and godly examples and patterns for the People to follow.

And now, that this present Congregation of Christ here assembled, may also understand your minds and wills in these things, and that this your promise may the more move you to do your duties, ye shall answer plainly to these things, which we in the Name of God, and of his Church, shall demand of you touching the same.

Do you think in your heart that you be truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Order of this Church of England, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?

Then you Answer.

I think it.

The

The Bishop.

Are you perswaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrines required of necessity to Eternal Salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ? and are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the People committed to your charge, and to teach nothing (as required of necessity to Eternal Salvation) but that which you shall be perswaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?

Ans. *Answer.*

I am so perswaded, and have so determined by Gods grace.

The Bishop.

Will you then give your faithfull diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church and Realm hath received the same, according to the Commandments of God; so that you may teach the People committed to your cure and charge, with all diligence to keep and observe the same?

Ans. *Answer.*

I will so do, by the help of the Lord.

The Bishop.

Will you be ready with all faithfull diligence to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange Doctrines, contrary to Gods Word; and to use both publick and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole within your Cures,

Cures, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given?

Ye Answer.

I will, the Lord being my helper.

The Bishop.

Will you be diligent in Prayers, and in reading of the holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledg of the same; laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?

You Answer.

I will endeavour my self so to do, the Lord being my helper.

Ye shall The Bishop.

Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your own selves and your families, according to the Doctrine of Christ, and to make both your selves and them, as much as in you lyeth, wholsome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?

You Answer.

I will apply my self thereto, the Lord being my helper.

The Bishop.

Will you maintain and set forward, as much as lieth in you, quietness, peace, and love among all Christian People, and especially among them that are or shall be committed to your Charge?

You Answer.

I will so do, the Lord being my helper.

The

The Bishop

Will you reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief Ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and Government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting your selves to their godly judgements?

Answer

I will so do, the Lord being my helper.

These are the sacred Bonds, in which you tyed your selves to Christ, when you entred into his Service, and were made his Ministers: That is, had the highest Honour conferred on you, but withall the greatest Trust; which if it be not duly discharged, will bring you under the heaviest guilt. You have need therefore to quicken your selves, to be faithfull in your Office, by reflecting very often on these holy Resolutions, or Vows rather, which you made when you undertook it: And pray to God also constantly to be your Helper; as the Bishop did after those Demands in these words,

Almighty God, who hath given you this will to do all these things, Grant also unto you Strength and Power to perform the same; that he may accomplish his work which he hath begun in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

It would conduce very much to the *accompliſhing of his work in you*, if you would reflect often and ſeriouſly, upon the very firſt ſtep you made towards it; when you declared (at your admiſſion to the Order of *Deacons*) that *you truſted you were inwardly moved by the holy Ghoſt, to take upon you this Office and Miniſtration: i. e.* Not by mere Worldly ends and conſiderations, that you might get a livelyhood; but by Spirituall and Heavenly motives, out of a deſire (as it follows there in that firſt Queſtion) *to ſerve God, for the promoting of his Glory, and the edifying of his People.*

This Queſtion, you may obſerve, was not renewed afterward, when you came to be admitted to the Order of *Prieſthood*, becauſe it was ſuppoſed that the ſame Motions continued in you, which you felt at firſt; or rather that they were grown ſtronger, preſſing you forward to deſire to be made compleat Miniſters of Jeſus Chriſt, for the advancement of his Kingdom in the World. Now if what you affirmed at your entrance into his Service was true, that you

you were *inwardly moved to it by the holy Ghoſt* (out of Love to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and to thoſe Souls which coſt him no leſs than his pretious Blood) no Queſtion that bleſſed Spirit of Grace, which began a good work in you, hath never ceaſed ſince that time (unleſs you have *quenched the Spirit*, which God forbid) to move you to mind your duty, and purſue the end of your Miniſtration: That is, to have this conſtantly in your thoughts, to apply your ſelves wholly to this one thing, how you may win Souls to the Knowledge, and Love, and Obedience of our Saviour.

For this is your Office (which you undertook by the *motion of the holy Ghoſt*) and therefore this ought to be your conſtant deſign, your buſineſs, your ſtudy and daily care; how you may bring thoſe Souls that are committed to your charge, unto their Bleſſed Redeemer in Heaven: by inſtructing both Young and Old in the Truth, as it is in Chriſt; by preſſing it upon their hearts, both in Catechizing and Preaching; by perſwading them to the practice of every

ry part of their Christian duty; by stirring them up when they are negligent; taking all opportunities, not only in Publick, but (according to your promise) in Private also, to admonish and exhort them, both in Health and in Sickness: that they may sensibly perceive the great worth of their Immortal Souls, even by your unwearied Diligence, Labour, Pains and Care, to save them. *Amen.*

July 6. 1692.

Sy. *Elienſ.*

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